

It is not feasible to cite here all the sayings of the blessed Companions and their immediate Successors (*Tābi'īn*) which affirm the actual occurrence of abrogation in the case of injunctions laid down by the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadīth*. Some of these have been quoted, along with the evidence for the authenticity of the reports, in the commentaries of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Kathīr etc. and in "Al-Durr al-Manthur". As for the reports less strongly authenticated, they are just innumerable. That is why there has always been a total consensus of the '*Ulamā*' on the question of *Naskh*, except for Abu Muslim al-Isfahānī and a few others from among the *Mu'tazilah* who have denied the actual occurrence of abrogation -- but Imām Rāzī has, in his commentary, exposed in detail the hollowness of their opinion.

The terminology of the *Naskh*

It is also essential to keep in mind a certain distinction in the use of the word *Naskh* as a technical term of the Shari'ah. The technical sense of the word implies changing an injunction, and replacing one injunction by another. Now, this change may consist in repealing an injunction altogether and replacing it by another (for example, fixing the Ka'bah as the Qiblah -- the direction towards which Muslims turn in their prayers -- instead of the *Baytul-Maqdis*); the change may equally consist in retaining an injunction but adding certain condition and provisions to it. The '*Ulama*' of the early period of Islam have used the word *Naskh* in this general and comprehensive sense which includes the total repeal of an injunction as well as a partial change in an injunction with the addition of certain conditions, provisions or exceptions. That is why the '*Ulamā*' of the earlier period have indicated some five hundred verses of the Holy Qur'an which, according to them, have been abrogated.

But, according to the '*Ulamā*' of a later period, only that change is to be called a *Naskh* which cannot in any way be brought into consonance with an earlier injunction. Obviously, this approach greatly reduces the number of abrogated verses. For example, there are, according to al-Suyūṭī, only twenty such verses. Later on, Shāḥ Waliyyullah, seeking to bring the abrogated injunctions in consonance with the earlier injunctions, reduced the number of abrogated verses to only five -- these being the cases where later injunctions could not

be made to correspond with the earlier ones without far-fetched interpretations. This effort is highly commendable, because the basic postulate behind an injunction is its permanence, while abrogation goes against this postulate, and hence it is not proper to posit abrogation in a verse laying down an injunction which can, in some justifiable manner, be shown to be still valid.

But this effort to reduce the number of abrogated verses does not, and cannot in the least imply ²⁸ that the presence of abrogation is in any way -- may Allah forgive us for reproducing a blasphemy -- a shortcoming or defect in the Holy Qur'ān or Islām, that the 'Ulamā' have for the last fourteen hundred years been trying to remove it, that the ultimate inspiration came to Shāh Waliyyullāh whose extraordinary achievement lies in having reduced the number of abrogated verses to five, and that now one may wait for a few geniuses who would bring the number down to zero.

To adopt such an approach towards the question of "*Naskh*" is no service to Islam or to the Holy Qur'ān,²⁹ nor can it obliterate the profound investigations into truth of the matter made by the blessed Companions, their Successors, and the 'Ulamā' of the generations that followed them during the last fourteen hundred years, nor can it stop the recriminations of the enemies of Islam. In fact, all it would do is to furnish a weapon to the present-day traducers of Islam and those who wish to rebel against Islam, who would now be saying that what the 'Ulamā' of the Islamic *Ummah* have been maintaining on the subject for the last fourteen hundred years has finally proved to be wrong. May Allah forbid such a thing! If this door is opened, it would let in all kinds of disorders, and all the injunctions of the Sharī'ah would come under suspicion. Then, is there any guarantee that the results of this "modernistic" research would not turn out to be wrong tomorrow!

We have come across certain recent writings in which an attempt has been made to revive the argument of Abū Muslim al-Isfahānī.

28. As the 'modernists' have been all too impatient to believe.

29. To which pretends the whole tribe of self-styled scholars, researchers, "experts in Islamic studies" and "revivificateurs of Islam."

Such writers begin with the assumption that the Arabic word *Mā* in verse 106 is not a relative or adverbial pronoun signifying "whenever", or "whichever" but a conjunction implying "if" that introduces a conditional clause; so, they translate the first phrase of the the verse not as "whichever verse We abrogate", but as "if We abrogate a verse", and say that the statement pertains to a supposition or to an imaginary situation as do the phrases beginning with the Arabic word *Law* (لَوْ : if) -- for example: لَوْ كَانَ فِيهَا إِلَهَةٌ : "If there were in the sky and the earth another god beside Allah" (21:22) or إِنَّ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ : "If the All-Merciful had a son" (43:81). On this basis, they argue that abrogation is possible, but has never actually occurred. Such writers, we are afraid, do not show an intimate knowledge of Arabic grammar, for there is a great deal of difference between a condition suggested by the word *Mā* and the imaginary situation introduced by the conjunction *Law*. Moreover, it is on the basis of this verse itself that the blessed Companions have affirmed the occurrence of abrogation, and have even cited many instances. So have their Successors and all authentic Commentators. In view of such unanimity, the new-fangled interpretation cannot be acceptable. Even Shāh Waliyyullāh, in reducing the number of abrogated verses, has never thought of denying the fact of abrogation. In short, all the authentic and authoritative 'Ulamā', from the days of the blessed Companions down to our own day, have always affirmed not only the possibility, but also the actual occurrence of abrogation. This has been the position of all the 'Ulamā' of Deoband too, without any exception.

The injunctions with regard to abrogation are too many and too intricate to be discussed here -- they properly belong to the books on the Principles of Jurisprudence.

Verse 108

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سُئِلَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ
وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ۝

Or, do you rather want to ask your Prophet as Mūsā was asked earlier? And whoever takes to infidelity in exchanges of faith has certainly missed the straight path. (Verse 108)

Hostility to the Holy Prophet ﷺ had become so habitual to the Jews that they were always making insolent demands. Once they asked him to bring before them whole of the Qur'an all at once just as the Torah had been revealed. In reprimanding them for making such improper demands on the prophets of their time, the verse reminds them how their forefathers too had done the same -- for example, they had asked Sayyidnā Mūsā (Moses عليه السلام) to help them to see Allah openly with their physical eyes. In such cases, the intention of the Jews had never been to seek guidance or to satisfy their doubts or to strengthen their faith, but only to cast aspersions on a prophet, or to question the wisdom of Allah. The verse indicts this behavior as *Kufr* (infidelity). Such demands are improper, because there is a *raison d'être* for everything Allah does, but divine wisdom alone knows what that is, and the creature has no right to determine the precise mode of his Creator's acts -- he should not even ask the why and wherefore of a divine action, but accept it and submit himself to the Divine Will.

If one takes this verse as having been addressed to the Muslims, it would mean that they are being warned against making improper demands on the Holy Prophet ﷺ .

Verses 109 - 110

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّوكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفَّارًا
حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ فَاعْفُوا
وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَ اللَّهَ بِأَمْرِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
قَدِيرٌ ۝ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ
مِّنْ خَيْرٍ يَّحْدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ۝

Many among the people of the Book desire to turn you, after your accepting the faith, back into disbelievers -- all out of envy generating from their hearts, even after the truth has become clear to them. So, forgive and overlook till Allah brings out His command. Certainly, Allah is powerful over everything. And be steadfast in *Salāh*, and give *Zakāh*. And whatever good you send

forth for yourselves, you will find it with Allah. Certainly, Allah is watchful of what you do. (Verses 109 - 110)

Some of the Jews, pretending to be the well-wishers of the Muslims, were always inventing new stratagems to make them turn away from Islam, and, in spite of repeated failure in this effort, did not refrain from it. The verse warns the Muslims against their intentions, which are motivated, not by sincerity and friendship, but by envy -- which in its turn arises not from anything the Muslims do, but spontaneously from within themselves even after they have come to understand clearly what the truth is. The verse also asks the Muslims not to give way to their justifiable anger at such misconduct, but to forgive the Jews, and wait till Allah sends a new commandment with regard to such matters. Thus, the verse gives an indication that Allah is soon going to lay down a law for the preservation of peace and order on the earth which would guide the Muslims in dealing with mischief-makers -- the law, of course, being the permission to go to war against the enemies of Islam. The Muslims were actually conscious of their own weakness and the strength of their foe, and could have wondered how they would be able to act upon the new law. So, the verse reminds them that Allah's power extends over everything, small or big, ordinary or extraordinary.

The next verse asks the Muslims to continue offering their prayers and paying *Zakāh* and when the new law comes down, they can add the participation in a *Jihād* to these good deeds which they have already been performing. Nor should the Muslims suppose that until they can take part in a *Jihād*, mere prayers and fasting will not bring them the spiritual merit they desire; in fact, they shall receive a full reward in the other world for each and every good deed they perform, for Allah knows what people do, and not a particle of one's good deeds shall be lost.

This command to show forbearance towards the Jews was proper to the situations of the Muslims at that time. Later on, Allah fulfilled the promise made in verse 109, and sent down the injunction with regard to *Jihād*. Then, this new law was applied to the Jews as well as to other miscreants - in order to prevent disorder and to make peace

and order prevail on the earth, Muslims went to war against them, and the mischief-makers were either killed, or forced into exile, or made to pay *Jizyah*.³⁰

Verses 111 - 113

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصْرِيًّا تِلْكَ
 أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝ بَلَىٰ مَنْ
 أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ
 عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ۝ وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصْرِيَّةُ عَلَىٰ
 شَيْءٍ وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرِيَّةُ لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ
 الْكِتَابَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ
 بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ۝

And they say that no one shall ever enter Paradise unless he is a Jew, or a Christian. These are their fancies. Say, "Bring your proof, if you are truthful." Of course, whosoever submits his self to Allah and is good in deeds has his reward with his Lord, and there shall be no fear for such men, nor shall they grieve. And the Jews say: "The Christians stand on nothing" and the Christians say, "The Jews stand on nothing" -- and they both read the Book! Similarly, those who do not know say as they (the Jews and the Christians) do. So Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in what they used to dispute. (Verses 111 - 113)

The Jews and the Christians were hostile not only to the Muslims, but also to each other. They had forgotten the essence of religion -- that is, adherence to the true and authentic doctrines, and performance of good deeds as laid down by the Shari'ah -- and had identified it with a mere affiliation to a racial or social community. Each of the two groups claimed that it had the exclusive right to go to

30. Which is a special levy on non-Muslims who live under the protection of the Islamic state and which absolves them from military service.

the Paradise, without having any argument to substantiate the claim. The Jews read the Torah, while the Christians read the Evangel, and they could have easily seen that the two Books confirm each other. Each party used to assert, in its malice, that the religion of the other was baseless. This gave an excuse to the *mushrikīn* (associators) who, in spite of their ignorance, began to say the same of both the religions.

The Holy Qur'ān dismisses these pretensions as mere fancy and self-delusion. It declares that other people too will go to Paradise who have, in their time, been following the Shari'ah of their own prophet, and who, now that the Holy Qur'ān also has abrogated all the earlier Divine Books, follow the Islamic Shari'ah. Verse 112 lays down the general principle in this respect, which is accepted by the followers of all the Divine Books. The essence of religion, whether it be Islam or Christianity or Judaism, lies in two things. (1) One should obey Allah in one's belief as well as in one's actions. (2) This obedience should not arise from expediency, but one should surrender oneself to divine commandments in all sincerity. Moreover, it is not enough to be worthy of Paradise merely to have a sincere intention to obey Allah, and then to invent, according to one's own fancy, the modes and forms of obedience, for it is absolutely essential that the forms of worship and the modes of obedience should be no other than those which Allah Himself has appointed through the agency of His prophets -- it goes without saying that since the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān this can only mean accepting and following the Islamic Shari'ah. We may add that in connection with the first of these two principles, the Holy Qur'ān employs the Arabic word *اسْلَمَ* : *Aslama* which signifies total submission to Allah, and in connection with the second word *Muhsin*, which signifies *وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ* : "one who performs good deeds" according to the Shari'ah.

The differences between the Jews and the Christians

In so far as these verses deal with the claims of the Jews and the Christians, the point of the argument is this:- Having laid down the two principles the acceptance of which makes one worthy of Paradise, the Holy Qur'ān suggests that they should now try to find out who is really acting upon them. Obviously, one who keeps following an in-

junction even after it has been abrogated cannot be described as obedient, and hence the Jews and the Christians no longer deserve this title. After the abrogation of an injunction, obedience consists in acting upon the new injunction which has replaced the earlier one. This condition is now being fulfilled only by the Muslims who have accepted the latest and the last Prophet ﷺ and his Shari'ah. Hence, they alone shall now be considered worthy of Paradise. The condition of one's being sincere in one's obedience excludes the hypocrites too, for the Shari'ah counts them among the infidels, and thus assigns them to Hell.

Verse 112 also announces the reward of those who act upon these principles -- on the Day of Judgment, they shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve, as angels will give them good tidings. As for the debates among the Jews, the Christians and the associators, Verse 113 declares that Allah will Himself decide the question finally on the Day of Judgment. In fact, the question has already been settled on the basis of what Allah has revealed in His Books as well as on the basis of rational argument; the final decision on the Day of Judgment will be of the visible kind -- those who follow the Truth will be sent to Paradise, while those who go after falsehood will be cast down in Hell.

These verses provide a warning to the Muslims as well, lest they too should delude themselves like the Jews and the Christians, and suppose that merely because they belong to the social community of Muslims and can, as such, claim to be Muslims, whereby they can dispense with the need to obey Allah and to follow the Shari'ah, and yet receive the rewards Allah has promised to give to true Muslims. Even Muslims have no right to hope for these rewards until and unless they submit themselves totally, in thought and deed both, to the commandments of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ.

Verses 114 - 115

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَ
 سَعَى فِي خَرَابِهِ أُولَئِكَ مَا كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ ۗ
 لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ۝ وَلِلَّهِ

المشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ
عَلِيمٌ ٥

And who is more cruel than the one who prevents the mosques of Allah from His name being recited therein, and strives for their destruction? It was not for such men to enter them except in awe. For them there is disgrace in this world, and for them, in the other world, there is a mighty punishment. To Allah belongs the East and the West. So, whichever way you turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Embracing, all-Knowing. (Verses 114 - 115)

In order to understand these two verses, one should keep in mind three different incidents connected with the three groups hostile to Islam, all of which were, in one way or another, guilty of preventing people from worshipping Allah in mosques and of laying them waste.

(1) When Allah changed the Qiblah -- that is to say, commanded the Muslims to turn towards the Ka'bah in their *Salāh*, and not towards the *Baytul-Maqdis* --, the Jews raised all kinds of objections to it, and tried to produce in the minds of the Muslims doubts and misgiving which, had they taken root, would have led to the denial of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and to the giving up of prescribed *Salāh*, thus laying waste the mosque of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

(2) The Romans had once invaded Jerusalem, and the ignorant among them had polluted the *Baytul-Maqdis*, which naturally prevented people from performing *Salāh* in this mosque. The Christians in a way looked upon the Romans as their ancestors; moreover, the humiliation of the Jews was in itself pleasing to them. Thus, in refusing to condemn this misdeed of the Romans, the Christians too were being indirectly responsible for laying waste the mosque.

(3) At the time of the peace of *Hudaybiyyah*, the *mushrikīn* (associators) did not allow the Holy Prophet ﷺ to enter Makkah and to perform the Hajj. So, this group too was guilty of the same sin.

According to the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, Verse 114 refers to the second of these three incidents -- the commentator

Ibn Jarīr too accepts this view. But the commentator Ibn Kathīr follows Ibn Zayd in preferring the third as being the occasion on which this verse was revealed. The Holy Qur'ān, however, speaks in general terms of "the mosques of Allah" so as to lay down a regular and permanent law, for all the peoples, covering all the possible cases of desecrating mosques and of hindering the "remembrance" (ذِكْرٍ) of Allah in any way and thus laying them waste -- it denounces those who are capable of such a misdeed as being "unjust" or "cruel", and threatens them with humiliation in this world and dire punishment in the other, for the dignity of a mosque requires that one should enter it in a spirit of lowliness and respect, and with the fear of Allah in one's heart.

The prediction of the Holy Qur'ān came true. The groups which had been trying to lay waste the mosques were soon humiliated, and came under the Muslim rule. They are, of course, to meet a dire punishment in the other world for being disbelievers, but the punishment will be all the more severe on account of this additional sin.

The earlier verses have told us how each of these groups claimed to be on the right path. The present verse, in referring to their desecration of mosques, refutes this claim as being a shameless pretension on the part of those whose behaviour itself gives them the lie.

As for Verse 115, let us recall that the idolaters compelled the Holy Prophet ﷺ to migrate from Makkah to Madinah, and thus separated him from the Ka'bah (the incident is, of course, known as the *Hijrah*). For some sixteen or seventeen months after that, the Muslims had to, under the commandment of Allah, turn towards the *Baytul-Maqdis* (at Jerusalem) while offering *Salāh*. But the Holy Prophet ﷺ felt a deep longing for turning towards the Ka'bah, and from time to time he would look upwards, waiting for the Archangel Jibrā'īl to come with a new commandment in this respect. Finally, such a commandment did come, and Allah changed the orientation (Qiblah). Speaking of this modification, the Holy Qur'ān says:

قَدَرْتَنِي تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ
شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ ۗ

We do see how you raise your face again and again towards

the sky. So, We are going to give you the orientation which you desire. Therefore, turn your face towards the Holy Mosque at Makkah, and all of you too, wheresoever you may be, turn towards it." (2:144)

This new commandment naturally made the Muslims very happy, but the Jews, in their habitual malice, made it an occasion for taunting them and accusing them of going against the way of the earlier prophets.

Thus, there are two facets to Verse 115. On the one hand, it is an answer to the objection raised by the Jews; on the other hand, it brings comfort to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and to the blessed Companions. The verse points out that had Allah been limited to any one direction, a fixed and permanent orientation would have been necessary for worshipping Him, but that, being infinite and beyond all possible limitations and qualifications, He is the Lord of the East and the West and of all conceivable directions -- He is everywhere, and surrounds everything. Wheresoever a man turns, he shall find Allah "facing" him -- that is to say, ready to accept his prayers and to shower His bounties on him. Consequently, neither does the *Baitul-Maqdis* nor the Ka'bah enjoy an inherent or inalienable superiority; either of them can acquire a position of privilege only through divine ordination. All that matters is to obey the commandment of Allah, which alone can make one worthy of receiving His grace. In order to win His pleasure, one has to orient oneself according to what He Himself has determined. If, in spite of being infinite and free from all limitations, Allah has yet fixed a particular orientation, it is because He is Omniscient, and knows what is the best in a certain situation and for a certain people.

Although it is not possible for man to comprehend fully the wisdom which is inherently present in each and every divine commandment, yet the fixing of a definite orientation for *Salāh* has a very obvious *raison d'etre*. Whichever way one turns, one would, no doubt, find Allah "facing" him; but if one has to choose a direction every time one starts to pray, it would only mean a dispersion of one's attention. And when several men are offering their prayers jointly it would really be odd if each one of them adopts a different orientation. So, a fixed orientation for all helps the individual and the groups both in

acquiring the necessary concentration of mind and the sense of a joint purpose.

This explanation satisfactorily dispels the objection often raised by certain antagonists who accuse the Muslims of being "the worshippers of the Ka'bah." If, by way of self-justification, they should still assert that they too keep the idols in front of them while meditating or worshipping for the same purpose of attaining a state of concentration, the claim does in no way reinforce their accusation against the Muslims. Moreover, an impartial investigation into the respective attitudes and frames of minds would easily show how genuine the Muslims are in their claim to be worshipping no one but Allah, and how dubious the position of the others is in this respect. Even if we accept the claim that idols or icons are no more than a means to an end, one would, in employing idols as a "support", still be required to produce a relevant injunction from a Shari'ah which has not been abrogated as yet. Today, the Muslims alone possess such a Shari'ah.

Before we proceed, we must sound a note of caution. Verse 115 says that whichever way one turns, one would find "the face of Allah", and that Allah being "All-Embracing" surrounds everything. Wisdom lies in not trying to investigate unnecessarily into the meanings of these or similar statements. For, just as it is not at all possible for a creature to comprehend fully the "Being" (*Dhāt*) of Allah, it is equally impossible to comprehend the essential reality of the "Attributes" (*Sifāt*). All that man is required to do is to have a general faith in the Realities of the Divine Order - there is no obligation for him to look into the particularities of this sphere which is totally beyond human reach.

Injunctions and related considerations

Verse 114 lays down, or helps us to infer, some very important injunctions:-

(1) All the mosques in the world are equally worthy of respect. Just as it is a great sin to desecrate in any way the *Baytul-Maqdis*, or the mosque attached to the Ka'bah (*Al-Masjid al-Harām*) or the mosque of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the same prohibition holds good with regard to all other mosques. These three mosques, no doubt, enjoy a

superior position, and special respect is to be paid to them. The reward for offering prayers once in *Al-Masjid al-Harām* is equal to that of praying a hundred thousand times elsewhere; the reward for praying in the mosque of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and in the *Baytul-Maqdis* equals that of praying fifty thousand times. To make a long journey for the purpose of praying in any one of these three mosques is a meritorious act which makes one worthy of receiving a special *barakah*. On the other hand, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has forbidden it that one should make a long journey in order to offer one's prayers in a mosque other than these three, believing it to be a meritorious act.

The sanctity of the Mosque

(2) It is forbidden to prevent people, in any form or manner possible, from offering their prayers or "remembering" Allah in a mosque. An obvious form of such interference is not to allow someone to enter a mosque or to offer his prayers or to read the Holy Qur'an there. A less explicit form is to produce some kind of a noise in the mosque itself or play music nearby, and thus to disturb people in their prayers or in their "remembrance" (ذِكْر) of Allah. Similarly, if one starts reciting the Holy Qur'an or "remembering" Allah loudly so as to disturb the people who are offering supererogatory prayers (*Nawāfil*) or themselves reading the Holy Qur'an or silently "remembering" Allah (*Dhikr*), one is being guilty of the same sin. Therefore, the *Fuqahā'* (masters of Islamic jurisprudence) have forbidden this practice. But, if people are not present in the mosque, one may recite the Holy Qur'an or make "*dhikr*" in a loud voice. On the basis of this principle we can also see that it is forbidden to beg or to collect donations even for a religious purpose while people are engaged in their prayers or in "*dhikr*."

(3) All the possible forms of laying waste a mosque are forbidden. This includes not only demolishing and destroying a mosque, but also producing conditions which result in a mosque being laid waste or deserted. For, laying waste a mosque implies that few, or only a few people should come there for offering their prayers. A mosque can be said to be flourishing, not on the score of the beauty of its architecture or of its ornamentation, but only when it is full of men who come to pray and to "remember" Allah. Says the Holy Qur'an:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنِ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ
وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ

Only those do populate the mosques of Allah who believe in Allah and in the Day of Judgment, who are steadfast in *Salāh* and pay the *Zakāh*, and do not fear anyone but Allah" (9:18).

So, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has foretold that when the Day of Judgment comes close, the mosques of the Muslims would be beautifully designed and decorated and be apparently full of people, but they would in reality be deserted, for a few people would go there for the purpose of offering their prayers. We are also reminded of what the fourth *Khalīfah* and the blessed Companion 'Alī رضي الله عنه has said. There are, according to him, six deeds which behove a man -- three of them pertain to the state when one is living at home, and the other three to the state when one is on a journey. The first three are -- to read the Holy Qur'ān, to populate the mosques, and to bring together a number of friends who wish to serve Allah and His faith. The other three are -- to spend out of what one has over one's needy companions of the way, to be polite to everyone, and to be cheerful with one's co-travellers so long as one does not go beyond the limits allowed by the Shari'ah. What he means by "populating" the mosques is that one should enter them in a spirit of humility and with the fear of Allah in one's heart, and then engage oneself in prayers or in reciting the Holy Qur'ān or in making "*dhikr*." In opposition to this, the laying waste of mosques would mean that few, or only a few people should offer their prayers in them, or that a set of circumstances is allowed to develop which makes it difficult for those who are present to acquire the proper attitude of humility.

If Verse 114 was revealed on the occasion of the Peace of *Hudaybiyyah* when the *mushrikīn* (associators) of Makkah had prevented the Muslims from entering *Al-Masjid al-Hārām*, then it is quite obvious that laying waste a mosque does not merely mean demolishing it, but also that it is not being allowed to be used for the purpose for which it was built -- that is, for *Salāh* and for the *Dhikr* (remembrance) of Allah.

As for Verse 115, we have already pointed out that Allah not being

limited to any particular direction or place, the Muslims do not, in turning towards the Ka'bah, at all mean to worship it, but that this particular orientation has been fixed on account of certain other considerations. We have also noted that for sixteen or seventeen months after the *Hijrah*, the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the blessed Companions were made to turn towards the *Baytul-Maqdis* in their prayers under divine commandment. This was, so to say, a practical demonstration of the truth that one can find Allah in every direction, and that Allah's attention encompasses all possible directions and dimensions simultaneously. A further and permanent demonstration of the same truth is provided by the injunction with regard to supererogatory prayers (*Nawāfil*). That is to say, if one wishes to offer such prayers while travelling on a horse or a camel etc., it is not necessary for him even to turn towards the Qiblah, for he is allowed to keep his face towards the direction in which his horse is moving, and to offer his supererogatory prayers through the gestures of his head and arms. In fact, according to certain commentators, Verse 115 lays down just this rule with regard to supererogatory prayers. But one must bear in mind that this injunction applies only to that form of travel which involves animals like a horse or a camel that makes it difficult for one to turn towards the Qiblah. But in other forms of travel (e.g., in a train or a ship or an aeroplane) where it is not difficult to turn towards the Qiblah, one has to adopt the proper orientation even in offering supererogatory prayers. However, should the train or the aeroplane change its direction while one is still praying and there is no room for readjusting one's orientation accordingly, one can go on and finish the prayers in the same state.

Similarly, if one does not know the direction of the Qiblah, nor can correctly determine it on account of the darkness of the night or for some other valid reason, nor can find someone to provide correct information, the same rule would apply in this case too. In such a situation, one is allowed to follow one's conjecture, and to turn in the direction which seems to be the most likely. The direction one chooses would serve as the Qiblah. If, having finished one's prayers, one discovers that the choice of this particular direction was wrong, even then one's prayers would remain acceptable, and one would not have to repeat them.

Verses 116 - 117

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحٰنَهُ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ
 الْاَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قٰنِطُوْنَ ۝ بَدِيعَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَاِذَا قَضٰى
 اٰمْرًا فَاِنَّمَا يَقُوْلُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُوْنُ ۝

And they say: "Allah has got a son." Pure is He. Instead, to Him belongs all that there is in the heavens and the earth. All stand obedient to Him. Originator of the heavens and the earth, when He decides a matter, to it He simply says: "Be", and it comes to be. (Verses 116 - 117)

As the Holy Qur'an reports in some other verses, some of the Jews called the Prophet Uzayr (Ezra عليه السلام) the son of God, as did the Christians in the case of Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus عليه السلام) and most of them still do, while the *mushrikīn* of Makkah considered the angels to be the daughters of God. These two verses show the absurdity of such assertions. For, even on rational grounds, it is totally impossible that God should have offspring. Were it at all possible, the situation would necessarily involve either of the two alternative characteristics -- the offspring would belong either to the same genus as the father does, or to a different genus. If it belongs to a different genus, that obviously is a defect, while God should in order to be God, be free of all defects -- as reason itself requires, and as Verse 116 affirms. If the offspring belongs to the same genus, that too is a contradiction in terms, for God has no equal and no existent can belong to the same genus as He does.

Let us explain what we mean. God alone is the Necessary Being (*Al-Dhāt al-Wājib*), and hence necessarily carries within Himself the Attributes of Perfection which are peculiar to Him alone and which cannot exist in any one other than God. Now, if we deny a necessary attribute to a certain being, we automatically deny the existence of that being. So, no one other than God can be a necessary being. Insofar as "necessity" is in itself the essence of the Ultimate Reality, or an inalienable quality of the Ultimate Reality, any one other than God cannot share the Reality with Him. Hence, it would be a plain and simple contradiction in terms of claim that any one other than God can belong to the same genus.

Having refuted the false claims of the Jews, the Christians and the *mushrikīn*, the two verses proceed to demonstrate how and why the Attributes of Perfection are peculiar to Allah Himself and Him alone. Firstly, all that exists in heaven or earth belongs to Allah. Secondly, everything is also subservient to Him -- in the sense that no one can interfere with His omnipotence (for example, with His power to create and to destroy), even if some men may be lax in obeying the injunctions of the Shari'ah. Thirdly, He is the Creator and the Inventor of the skies and of the earth. Fourthly, His power of creation is so mighty that when He wishes to do something (for example, wishes to create something), He does not need any instruments or helpers -- all that He does is to say, "Be", and the thing becomes what He wishes it to be. These four qualities are not to be found in anyone other than Allah. In fact, even those who attributed offspring to Him, believed in this truth. Thus, their claims to the contrary stand finally refuted.

The two verses give rise to certain other important considerations.

(1) If Allah has chosen to assign certain tasks to certain angels (for example, sending down rain or bringing to the creatures their nourishment), or has chosen to employ causes, materials or physical forces in order to produce certain effects, He has done so in His wisdom. So, it is neither permissible nor proper that men should look upon these angels or causes or physical forces as being effective agents in themselves, and turn to them for help in their need.

(2) The commentator al-Baydāwī has remarked that, Allah being the First Cause of the things, the earlier Shari'ahs had allowed the use of the title "Father" for Him, but that the ignorant misunderstood and distorted the sense of "Fatherhood" so badly that to entertain such a belief or to apply this title to Allah has now been declared to be an act of infidelity (*Kufr*). As this practice can lead to all kinds of doctrinal disorders, it is no longer permissible to employ this particular word or a similar expression with reference to Allah.³¹

31. As for creation taking place through the Divine Command, "Be", we would like to add a note, following the example of Maulanā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī in his "Bayān al-Qur'ān", for the benefit of those who happen to be interested in Western philosophy, or in Christian theology, or, worst of all, in the writings of the Orientalists and their translations of Sufi texts. Let us begin by saying that it is a mystery -- and we are

Verse 118

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا اللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَا آيَةٌ كَذَلِكَ
 قَالَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ تَشَابَهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا
 الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ۝

And say those who do not know: "Why is it that Allah does not speak to us, nor does a sign come to us?" So spoke those before them as these men do. Their hearts resemble each other. We have indeed made the signs clear for people who have certitude. (Verse 118)

The Jews, the Christians and the *mushrikīn* used to deny the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ and some of them did so out of sheer malevolence. In order to feel triumphant in this obstinacy, they would make absurd and impossible demands, two of which have

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using the word "mystery", not in the debased and the modern sense, but in the original meaning of the term which implies that certain realities are altogether beyond the reach of human understanding, and that certain other realities cannot and must not, even when partially or wholly understood, be given out to those who have no aptitude for receiving them, and that with regard to them it is advisable "to keep one's lips closed." In these matters, when and what one chooses to reveal is ultimately not the question of liberalism or democratism or egalitarianism, but that of "spiritual etiquette." Having repeated the warning given by Maulanā Thānavī himself, we shall do no more than explaining what "Bayān al-Qur'ān" says on the subject.

Regarding this particular mystery, there is a difference of approach between the two groups of the *Mutakallimīn* (the masters of *al-'Ilm al-Kalām* or dialectical theology). According to the Asha'ri group, "Be, and it comes to be" (كُنْ فَيَكُونُ: *Kun fa Yakūn*) is a metaphorical or allegorical expression. That is to say, the phrase does not signify that Allah actually addressed an existent and commanded it "to be", but it is an allegorical illustration of His omnipotence, suggesting that there is no interval between an act of will on His part and its realization. The commentator al-Baydawi has adopted this view. But, according to the Maturidi group, the phrase literally means what it says. This approach to the subject, however, produces a difficult problem. A command is given only to an existent. If a thing does not exist at all, how can Allah address it? On the other hand, if a thing does already exist, it is superfluous to command it "to be." The problem can easily be resolved if we keep two considerations in mind. Firstly, this command does not

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been mentioned here. To begin with, they insisted that Allah Himself should speak to them, either directly as He speaks to the angels, or through the angels as He speaks to the prophets, and that He should Himself proclaim his injunctions to them so as to make the intervention of a new prophet unnecessary, or should at least announce that He had sent Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ as a prophet, thus making it easy for them to have faith in him and to follow his guidance. Should Allah choose not to accept this demand, they were ready with another -- that is, Allah should send them a sign or proof in confirmation of his prophethood.

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belong to the order of *Tashrī'*: (تشریح : legislation) which requires the addressee to exist in actual fact and to possess understanding; it belongs to the order of *Takwīn*: (تكوين : creation) which is concerned with giving existence to non-existents.

This explanation, in its turn, brings us into the thick of a controversy that has muddled a great deal of Western philosophy and theology. We refer to the question of "creation arising out of nothingness" (Ex Nihilo), and the second of our two considerations will clarify it. It is usual enough to place "existence" (وجود : *Wujūd*) in opposition to "nothingness or non-existence" (عدم : 'Adam). But it has also been said that non-existence does not exist. For, Allah is omniscient, and Divine Knowledge comprehends everything that has been, or is, or will be, so that what does not yet exist according to our reckoning, does already exist in Divine Knowledge. To use a different expression, everything past, present or future has its "pure" and "subtle" counterpart in Divine Knowledge. If Western terminology should be more easily comprehensible to some of our readers, we can call these Prototypes, Numbers, or Essences, or Ideas or Archetypes, but each time we will have to give a more refined and a higher signification to these terms than Pythagoras or Plato ever did. The Sūfīs, however, call them "*Al-A'yān al-Thābitah*." With the help of this explanation we can see that when Allah wishes to create a thing, He commands its Essence, which already exists in His Knowledge, "to be", and it "comes to be" -- that is to say, comes to be actualised in the world. Thus, "creation" does not arise out of "nothingness." Before a thing comes to exist as an "actuality" in the world, it already exists as a "potentiality" in Divine Knowledge. It is this "potentiality" to which the Divine Command "Be" is addressed. Hence, it is equally true to say that Essences do not exist, and to say that Essences do exist. The first statement pertains to the knowledge of the creatures, and the second to the Divine Knowledge.

At the end, we shall again insist that no good can come out of unnecessarily meddling with such delicate questions, specially if the purpose is no more than to seek a new sensation.

In reply to them, Allah puts this demand down as being no more than a foolish custom which has all along been unthinkingly practised by ignorant people even in the earlier ages. Then, the verse traces the origin of this demand to a distortion of the heart, in respect of which all the ignorant people, past or present, are alike, hence the parrot-like repetition of the same demand throughout the ages.

The first of these demands was, on the face of it, silly enough, for, with all the grossness of their minds and hearts, they had the audacity to place themselves on the level of angels and prophets. So, the Holy Qur'an dismisses it as being unworthy of a reply. But in answer to the other demand, Allah reminds them that He has sent, not one, but a number of clear signs and proofs to confirm and establish the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ. But these signs and proofs can be of help only to those who sincerely wish to know the truth and to attain certitude. As for those who are not in search of the truth, but enjoy being stuck in their malice and obstinacy, there is no help for them.

At this point, we had better say a word to resolve a difficulty that is likely to arise. The Jews and the Christians were "the People of the Book", and some of them were men of learning, and yet Allah calls them ignorant. Why? The reason is that although Allah had sent such a large number of clear signs and definite proofs to establish the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ, yet they persisted in their denial. This is the mentality and the conduct of the ignorant.

Verse 119

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ
الْجَحِيمِ ۝

Surely, We have sent you with the truth, a bearer of good tidings, and a warner, and you will not be asked about the people of Hell. (Verse 119)

The implication of Verse 118 was that those who persisted in their denial of the Holy Prophet ﷺ did so out of sheer malice and ignorance, and could not be expected to reform themselves. Since he has been

sent as "the mercy for all the worlds", the thought of their being incorrigible was likely to make him sad on their account. So, in this verse Allah offers him a consolation. He has been sent down to men, bearing the truth and the genuine faith. His function is twofold -- to give glad tidings to those who accept the truth, and warnings of dire punishment to those who deny. Allah assures him that he will not be held responsible or taken to account for those who willingly pursue the way to Hell. All that he is required to do is to keep performing his own function, and not to worry as to who accepts the truth and who does not.

Verse 120

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ
 إِنَّ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ ۗ وَلَئِنَّ آتِبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي
 جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ۝

And the Jews will never be pleased with you, nor will the Christians, unless you follow their faith. Say: "Guidance of Allah is, indeed, the guidance." And were you to follow their desires after what has come to you of the knowledge, there shall be no friend for you against Allah, nor a helper. (Verse 120)

Being anxious to save as many men as possible from misguidance and damnation, the Holy Prophet ﷺ took great pains to convince the deniers, and was specially lenient and gentle with the People of the Book. In this verse, Allah informs him that their denial is not due to lack of convincing arguments and proofs, but is motivated by pride and self-satisfaction, for each of the two groups -- namely, the Jews and the Christians -- believes its own religion to be the only genuine religion, and there is no likelihood of pleasing either of them until and unless the Holy Prophet ﷺ accepts their religion. The religions of the Jews and the Christians, no doubt, were once genuine and had been instituted by Allah. But each had since distorted its religion out of shape; moreover, in sending down Islam as the final Shari'ah, Allah had abrogated all the earlier ones, and hence Islam had by now become the only Shari'ah acceptable to Allah, and in this sense the only genuine and veritable "guidance" possible in this last of all the ages.

It is on account of the present distorted state of the earlier religions, and specially because of their having been abrogated by Divine Commandment that Verse 120 equates them with *Ahwā'* (the plural of *Hawā'*) -- that is to say, personal desires, or individual opinions and baseless conjectures. Since the deniers are not willing to extricate themselves from their desires and fancies, it is not possible to please them without accepting their opinions -- a thing which a Messenger of Allah can never do. Should they affect a more friendly stance towards the Holy Prophet ﷺ, Allah asks him to say to them in plain and simple words that the only guidance worth the name is that which comes from Allah -- and He has already made it clear enough that Islam is now the only form of "guidance" acceptable to Him.

Now, supposing just for the sake of supposing that he should accept their fancies in spite of having received the Truth from Allah through revelation, the verse informs him that in such a case he would find no helper to save him from divine wrath. Other verses of the Holy Qur'an, of course, definitely establish the fact that Allah is pleased and will always remain pleased with the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and thus he can never be the object of divine wrath. Since divine wrath necessarily follows upon the acceptance of baseless fancies, it is logically impossible for him to follow the opinions of the Jews and the Christians, as divine pleasure and divine wrath cannot be combined with each other. On the other hand, they can never be pleased with him unless he follows their wishes. Consequently, one cannot expect from them any change of heart. Hence, the purport of Verse 120 is to advise the Holy Prophet ﷺ not to worry too much about them. ³²

Verse 121

الَّذِينَ اتَيْنَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۗ
وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُونَ ۝

32. Let us add that the warning is apparently addressed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, but is really intended for deniers, the purpose being to make them realize the dire consequences of their vanity. In fact, divine wrath is already visible, for the warning has been administered to them, not directly but obliquely, which shows the contempt in which Allah holds them -- Translator]

Those to whom We have given the Book and they recite it observing the rights of its recitation, it is they who believe in it. And those who disbelieve in it, they are the losers. (Verse 121)

Verse 120 dealt with the hopeless condition of the opponents of Islam among the People of the Book. Now, the present verse turns, in the usual manner of the Holy Qur'ān, to the other aspect, and speaks of those Jews and Christians who were honest and just, and, having recognised the truth, affirmed the Holy Prophet ﷺ and accepted Islam.

The verse tells us how it has been possible for these men to effect a radical change in themselves. Allah has given a Book to the Christians as well as to the Jews. But, unlike most of their co-religionists, these men have been reading the Book "observing the rights of its recitation." That is to say, they have distorted neither the words nor the meanings, nor have they tried to misinterpret or conceal the prophecies about the coming of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In other words, they have used their intellect in trying to understand the meanings, and their will in accepting the truth and in following it. It is they who acknowledge the Holy Qur'ān, and have faith in it. In doing so, they are actually affirming their own Books too and acting upon them insofar as their Books explicitly foretell the coming of the Last Prophet ﷺ and of the last Book of Allah. As for those who persist in their denial, they are bound to suffer the greatest loss, for they have refused to believe in the Last Revelation, and have, in fact, not shown much of a belief in their own Books, and not followed the guidance provided by them in this matter. ³³

33. The commentary we have here is based on a report from the blessed Companion Ibn 'Abbās, according to whom this verse was revealed on the occasion of the arrival of forty Christians from Abyssinia who had accepted Islam. But other commentators believe that "those to whom We have given the Book" are the blessed Companions, and "the Book" is the Holy Qur'ān. As for reading the Book "observing the rights of its recitation", it means enunciating each word correctly and clearly, and keeping the fear and love of Allah present in one's heart while reading, and also the resolve to follow divine guidance and to obey divine commandments. The blessed second *Khalīfah* 'Umar رضى الله عنه has said that reading the Holy Qur'ān "observing the rights of its recitation" requires that when one comes to a description of Paradise, one should pray to Allah for granting one this abode, and when one finds a description of Hell, one should seek Allah's protection from it. (Ibn Abi Hātim)]

Verses 122 - 123

يٰۤاَيُّهَا اِسْرٰٓءِٔلُ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيۤ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاَنْتِ
 فَضَّلْتُمْ كُمْ عَلٰى الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ۝ وَاْتَقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِيْ نَفْسٌ عَنْ
 نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَّلَا هُمْ
 يُنصَّرُوْنَ ۝

O children of Isrā'īl, remember My blessing that I conferred upon you, and that I gave you excellence over the worlds. And guard yourselves against a day when no one shall stand for anyone for anything, nor shall ransom be accepted from one, nor shall intercession be of benefit to him, nor shall they be given support. (Verses 122 - 123)

A large section of this Sūrah, ending with the previous verse, has been dealing with different aspects of the conduct of the Israelites (that is, the Jews) in the course of their history. This account had begun with the statement which has been repeated at the end in these two verses. The statement is of a general and principal kind, and the verses which come in between the beginning and the end are, so to say, a detailed demonstration of the statement. On the one hand, it encourages the Israelites to come back to the Straight Path by reminding them of the blessings which Allah has bestowed on them; on the other hand, it warns them of the consequences of their lapses by depicting the Day of Judgment. The purpose of repeating the statement at the end of the discussion is to make the two ideas sink deep into their minds. For, what is aimed at in a discussion is the affirmation of certain basic and general principles -- being succinct, they are easily kept alive in the mind, and, being comprehensive and readily applicable to particular situations, they make it easy for one to remember the details too. In the art of writing and speaking, it is considered to be one of the most effective means of carrying conviction that, before starting on a long analytical discussion of a subject, one should define the basic ideas very briefly and clearly which are always helpful in comprehending the details and the particularities, and that, in concluding the argument, one should repeat these ideas by way of a

summary. The repetition of the introductory statement here is of this very nature.

Verse 124

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ
لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ۝

And when his Lord put Ibrāhīm to a test with certain Words! And he fulfilled them. He said, "I am going to make you an *Imām* for the people." He said, "And from among my progeny?" He replied, "My promise does not extend to the unjust." (Verse 124) ³⁴

The great trials put to Ibrāhīm عليه السلام

The section dealing with the story of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام begins with Verse 124. It recounts how he was tried by Allah in different ways, how he came out of these trials successfully, and how he was rewarded. It also tells us that when Allah promised to make him a great guide to men, and their chief, (by conferring prophethood

34. So far a whole section of this Sūrah has been dealing directly with the conduct of the Jews in the course of their history, and their present hostility to Islam, delineating the inner motives and mainsprings of this rabid opposition. As we have seen, they were proud of being the children of Jacob and of Abraham (Sayyidnā Ya'qūb and Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام), and believed that, being the chosen people of God, they had the exclusive privilege of being the leaders of humanity, and hence the station of prophethood could not be conferred on anyone who did not belong to their race. Now, the Holy Qur'an proceeds, in the present section of the Surah, to refute this line of thought in an indirect manner, by telling the story of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and of his elder son Sayyidnā Ismā'il (Ishmael عليه السلام). This section is going to suggest some essential considerations in answer to the denial of the Holy Prophet ﷺ on the part of the Jews:- (1) He alone can be a guide to humanity who is not unjust and not a transgressor, and has successfully gone through the trial imposed on him by Allah -- and these qualifications the Jews do not fulfil. (2) The Ka'bah, towards which the Muslims turn in *Salāh* and which is not acceptable to the Jews, had actually been built by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and hence

on him, or by giving him a huge number of followers), he prayed for this reward to be bestowed on some from among his progeny too. Allah granted this prayer, but on one condition, which is also to serve as a general principle in this matter -- namely, that this dignity shall never be conferred on those who are disobedient and unjust, but on some of those from among his progeny who are obedient and just.

Now, Verse 124 gives rise to a number of very fundamental questions:- The purpose of a trial is to test the aptitude and worthiness of a man for a certain function, but Allah is all-knowing and knows every existent inside out. Then, what was the purpose of this trial? (2) What were the different forms of this trial? (3) What kind of success did Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام attain? (4) What is the nature of the reward he received? (5) What are the various aspects of the principle which defines the conditions necessary for receiving this reward ?

As for the purpose of the trials which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was made to undergo, we shall point out that the Arabic word رب : *Rabb* (Lord) occurring in this verse provides the clue to the problem. In saying that it was Allah Himself who put him through the trials, the verse chooses to employ, out of all the Divine Names, the title *Rabb*

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the orientation (Qiblah) of the Muslims is the same as was his. (3) The way of Islam is the Way of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام , and the Muslims alone are his real followers. (4) It was Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام himself who had prayed for the Last Prophet to be sent down to humanity, and hence one who at all wishes to follow his way cannot but affirm the Holy Prophet ﷺ and accept Islam. (5) It is wrong of the Jews to deny the Holy Prophet ﷺ merely on account of his not belonging to their race, for Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had two sons, Sayyidnā Ismā'il and Sayyidnā Ishāq (Ishmael and Isaac عليهم السلام), and he had prayed for divine grace to descend on both of them (Genesis, ch. 17), so that the superiority enjoyed by the children of Isaac عليه السلام in their own time had now been transferred to the children of Ismā'il عليه السلام . What these indications aim at is to show the Jews that if they wish to have a share in the grace of Allah, they had better acknowledge the Holy Prophet ﷺ and accept Islam, the last and now the only valid form of the Abrahamic Way --

Translator.

which indicates a specific Divine Attribute -- namely, that of making a thing attain the state of its perfection gradually and stage by stage. In other words, the trial of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was not the punishment for a crime, nor was it intended to uncover a hidden aptitude, but was a manifestation of this particular Divine Action, and a necessary part of the process of "nurturing" the prophet and making him reveal his inherent qualities to the world, so that he may be led, stage by stage, to assume his final station, already chosen for him by his Lord. We may note, in passing, that the Arabic text of the Verse places the object (*Ibrāhīm*) before the subject (*Rabb*), thus indicating the glorious position of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام among the prophets. We may also add that although it is Divine Knowledge and Will that chooses a man for prophethood, yet he is not allowed to assume this station until his aptitude and worthiness has openly shown itself for all men and angels to witness. This is just what had happened, as we have already seen in this Sūrah, in the case of the trial of Sayyidnā Adam عليه السلام before the angels.

As for the particular form in which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was tried, the Holy Qur'ān only refers to certain "things" (*Kalimah* -- literally, "word"). According to most of the commentators, the "things" or "words" mean certain divine injunctions. But there is some difference of views among the blessed Companions and their immediate successors as to what these injunctions were, and how many. According to some, they were ten, and, according to others, thirty. But basically there is no opposition among these views, for all the injunctions which have been mentioned in this context were, in one way or another, meant to serve as trials and tests. This is what the great commentators like Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Kathīr believe to be the truth of the matter. One thing is, however, quite clear. These trials were not like academic tests, nor were intended to gauge mental capacities or the grasp of mere theories; the purpose, on the other hand, was to test the readiness in obeying Allah and the steadfastness in submitting oneself to divine commandments. This helps us to see that what really has a value in the eyes of Allah is not theoretical hair-splitting, but actual deeds, within and without.

Let us now relate the story of some of the more important trials.

Since Allah intended to raise Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام to a specially exalted station among the prophets, and to confer on him the title of *Khalīlullāh* (the Friend of Allah), he was made to go through very severe trials. Not only his people, but his own family also was sunk deep in idol-worshipping; in opposition to their creed and customs, he was given "*Al-Dīn al-Hanīf*", "the Pure Religion", and was asked to go out to his people, and to bring them back to the Straight Path. Unflinchingly he obeyed the divine command, and, with the courage and determination of the prophet that he was, he set out to wage a war against idol-worship and to call them to the unalloyed worship of the One God. This obviously drew upon him the ire of his people and of their king *Namrūd* (Nimrod), who finally decided to burn him alive in a blazing fire. Seeking, as he did, nothing but the pleasure of his Lord, he gladly let himself be thrown onto the pyre. Since he had succeeded in this test, Allah commanded: قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ: "O fire, be coolness and safety for Ibrāhīm" (21:69). As one can see, the command was given to fire as such, and not to any particular one. Consequently, all fire, wherever it was present in the world, grew cold, and the fire set ablaze by *Namrūd* did so, too. Now, excessive cold is equally painful and killing - there is a region of extreme cold in Hell itself, called *Zamharīr*. So, in commanding fire to grow cold, Allah in His grace added the word *Salama* (be safe).

The second trial was that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was asked to leave his homeland, and to migrate to Syria along with his family. Then, he was commanded to leave even this country -- which he readily did, accompanied by his wife Hājirah (Hāgar - رضى الله عنها) and his infant son Sayyidnā Ismā'īl (Ishmael عليه السلام), and led by the archangel Jibrā'īl (Gabriel عليه السلام). (Ibn Kathīr) Whenever they passed through a fertile land, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام would wish to be allowed to settle there, but the archangel would inform him that Allah did not want him to do so. Finally, when they reached the barren desert which was destined to be the site of Makkah and where the Ka'bah was to be built, he was commanded to stay there. But now began a new trial, much more difficult for man to bear. He was ordered to leave his wife and son in the desert, and to go back to Syria. "The Friend of Allah" had so annihilated his own will and desire, and

was so anxious to obey his Lord that he did not allow even a moment to lapse between the command and its execution, and started on his journey without informing his wife. When she noticed that he was going away, she called after him -- but received no reply. Not even when she demanded why he was forsaking them in such a vast and lonely desert. But she was, after all, the wife of "the Friend of Allah", and could now see for herself how the matters stood. So, she asked if he had received a divine command. Only now Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام replied that it was so. Having understood the situation, she calmly remarked, "Alright, go. The Lord who has commanded you to part from us shall Himself look after us, and not let us be destroyed."

And she sat back in the desert, full of trust and peace, with the infant on her lap. But as time passed, thirst, her own and specially that of her suckling son, compelled her to leave it behind and to go in search of water. She climbed up and down the hills of Ṣafā and Marwah, but had, after seven attempts, to come back unsuccessfully. It is to commemorate this event that running seven times between the two hills has been made an obligatory part of the rites of the Hajj. As she returned to her son, the mercy of Allah descended in the form of the archangel Jibrā'il عليه السلام who made a spring of fresh water spout forth from the parched ground -- the same spring which is now called *Zamzam*. In a day or two, the water began to draw animals towards itself, and the sight of animals brought men to the place. By and by, the provisions necessary for human life became regularly available, and the future city of Makkah began to take shape.

The infant -- who was to become Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليه السلام -- began to grow up, and was soon able to take upon himself the usual functions of human life. Under divine permission, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام came now and then to see how his wife and son were doing. It is now that Allah chose to submit him to the greatest of all possible trials. The son had grown up in such unpromising circumstances, and been deprived of constant fatherly care and affection. Now, the father received the command to slaughter his son with his own hand. Says the Holy Qur'an:

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَبْنَئُ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانظُرْ مَاذَا

تَرَىٰ قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ أَفَعَلَ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ ۝

When he had reached the age of being able to help his father in his work, the latter said, 'My son, I see in a dream that I am slaughtering you. Now, say, what do you think?' He replied, 'My father, do as you have been bidden; you shall find me, if Allah so wills, one of the patient'. (37: 102)

Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام took his son to the wilderness of *Minā*, and fulfilled, so far as he himself was concerned, the divine commandment. But Allah did not really mean to have the son slaughtered, but only to test the father. If we consider the words of the Holy Qur'ān just cited, we shall find that in his dream, he had not seen the accomplishment of the slaughter, but only the act of slaughtering. And this much he did perform. In this respect, revelation came to him in the form of a dream, picturing the act, perhaps for this very reason - that is to say, Allah did not want to give him a verbal command to sacrifice his son. Hence, Allah commended him for having صَلَّاتُ الرُّؤْيَا : "confirmed the dream" (37:105). In recompense for this total submission to divine will, Allah sent down a ram from heaven to be sacrificed in place of Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليه السلام . Now, the annual sacrifice of sheep or goats etc. has been made a regular form of worship in commemoration of the way of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام .

In addition to those rigorous trials, a number of other restrictions were imposed on him in the shape of certain injunctions, which too, he fulfilled as devotionally. Ten of these commandments are known as the characteristics of the *Fitrah* and are concerned with the cleanliness and purification of the body. These ten have been made permanent injunctions for all the later *Ummahs* (or communities of believers) too, and the Last Prophet ﷺ has insistently commanded his followers to fulfil them.

Ibn Kathīr has reported from the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās that thirty elements make up the whole of Islam, ten of which have been mentioned in Sūrah, ("Al-Barā'ah, or "Al-Tawbah"), the other ten in Sūrah 33 ("Al-Aḥzāb"), and the last ten in Sūrah 23 ("Al-Mu'minūn"). These two had formed a part of the trials of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and he fulfilled these conditions with equal faithfulness.

Sūrah 9 lays down these ten qualities as being characteristic of true believers:

التَّائِبُونَ الْعَابِدُونَ الْحَامِدُونَ السَّائِحُونَ الرَّاكِعُونَ السَّاجِدُونَ الْأَمْرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَالنَّاهُونَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَالْحَافِظُونَ لِحُدُودِ اللَّهِ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۝

"Those who repent, those who worship (Allah), those who praise (Allah), those who keep a fast, those who bow down and prostrate themselves (before Allah), those who invite others to good deeds and forbid evil deeds, those who keep within the bounds fixed by Allah. And give good tidings to the true believers." (9:112)

And the ten qualities mentioned in Sūrah 23 are:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۝ الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ
مُعْرِضُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ ۝ إِلَّا
عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ ۝ فَمَنِ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ
ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمْتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رِعُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ
عَلَىٰ صَلَواتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ۝ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ ۝ الَّذِينَ يَرْتَمُونَ الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ
فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۝

"Those true believers shall certainly prosper who show humility in their *Salāh*, and turn away from idle activities, and are keen to purify themselves, and guard their private parts except from their wives and what their right hands own (bondswomen) - which is not blameworthy, but whoever seeks after more than that is a transgressor - and those who preserve what has been entrusted to them and also their covenant, and who are regular in performing their *Salāh*. Those are the inheritors who shall inherit Paradise, and they shall live there forever." (23:1-11).

And the ten qualities mentioned in Sūrah 33 are as follows:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَنَاتِ وَالْقَنَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ
وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ
وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ
اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ۝

"Men and women who perform what Islam enjoins upon them,

men and women who are true believers, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, men and women who are patient, men and women who possess humility, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their private parts, men and women who remember Allah abundantly - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." (33:35)

A third question with regard to Verse 124 still remains to be answered - what degree of success did Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام attain in these trials? The Holy Qur'ān defines his accomplishment in these words: وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّى : "And Ibrahim who paid his debt in full." (53:37)

As for the reward he received, Verse 124 itself has announced it: قَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا "He (Allah) said - "I am going to make you an *Imām* for the people." The Arabic word *Imām*, which we have not translated here, lexically signifies "leader or chief or guide." Since the present verse is related to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, the word *Imām* in this context means, above all, "a prophet", though it includes the general sense of "leadership", too, as also of the title "Patriarch" which the Jews and Christians have given to him. Prophethood, let us repeat, cannot be won through personal effort; all the same, a prophet has to display his perfection in the thirty qualities we have just referred to, and even people of a lower scale must, in order to be worthy of leadership in a general sense, possess these qualities in their own degree. The Holy Qur'ān makes it quite plain in another place:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ

"And from among them We appointed some as leaders to guide men by Our command, when they were patient (in restraining themselves from disobedience), and had a sure faith in Our commandments." (32:24).

This verse gives a resume of the thirty qualities in the two words, *Ṣabr* (patience) and *Yaqīn* (sure faith, or certitude) - the second refers to the perfection of knowledge, and the first to the perfection of actual practice.

The last question pertains to the law which lays down that the station of a guide and leader would not be granted to the unjust and the disobedient. To hold this station is, in a way, to be a viceregent of

Allah, and hence this rank cannot be given to a rebel. It follows from this that Muslims, insofar as they have a choice in the matter, should not appoint as their ruler or representative a man who is a rebel against Allah or disobedient to Him.

The word *ẓālim* ("unjust") also shows us - and very explicitly, too - that each and every prophet is totally sinless before becoming a prophet as much as after becoming a prophet. Certain words in the Holy Qur'ān, which seem to suggest the contrary, have been employed, not in a literal or technical sense, but only metaphorically - for example, in the case of Sayyidnā Adam عليه السلام. To interpret such expressions in the sense of technical "sin" constitutes a very grave doctrinal error, and an insistence on such an interpretation opens the way to further errors.³⁵

35. We may add a few words for the benefit of those who are anxious to adopt unquestioningly the literary and philosophical mores of the West. Since the Second World War, the writings of the Danish man of letters and thinker, Kierkegaard (who was a dilettante in theology too), have been casting a sort of paralysing fascination over the men of sensibility in the West. Particularly his book "Fear and Trembling", which deals with the trial of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام avowedly in the manner of a psychological novel, is supposed to have triggered into action a number of Existentialist philosophies, and even to have furnished the point of departure for all modernistic Christian theology, specially of the Protestant persuasion.

Now, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was, even according to the admission of Jews and Christians, a prophet, and not "l'homme moyen sensuel" which is the subject matter of the novel, of psychology, and, not the least, of the theology of the Dane.

Secondly, he did not merely have to go through emotional stress and strain, or through a problem of the conscience, or through a "crisis of identity" - the fear and the trembling, as the philosopher maintains -, but was equally tried in the matter of faithfully observing divine injunctions.

Thirdly, when he knew that Allah had chosen him to be a prophet, he did not grow silent and secretive and lonely - as the fancy of our literary artist would have us believe -, but proclaimed the fact to others. Without such a proclamation, he would not at all have been able to perform the function of a prophet. In fact, it has been said that "the Friend of Allah" would not take his daily meals until he had found a guest to share it with him. In short, all we wish to point out is that the nature of prophethood is a degree of reality which we can understand only partially, and that too only with the help of Divine Books, and hence it is not a sphere in which human fantasy may be allowed to roam at its sweet will.

Verse 125

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَشَابَهَ لِّالنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا وَآتَخَذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ
 إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنَّ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ
 لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ۝

And when We made the House a (sacred) resort for men, and a place of peace! And make from the station of Ibrahim a place of prayer. And We gave direction to Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl: "Purify My House for those who are to circumambulate (make *Tawāf*) or stay in seclusion (do *I'tikāf*) or bow and prostrate (in prayer)." (Verse 125)

The History of Ka'bah

In the course of the story of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, we now come to the building of the "House of Allah" - the Ka'bah. An answer is thus being given to the Jews who used to deny the Holy Prophet ﷺ on the ground of their assumption that prophethood could not be given to anyone outside their own clan, and who used to scoff at the Muslims for turning towards the Ka'bah in their prayers, and to believe that the Hajj was no more than a custom of the ignorant Arabs. The earlier verse had made it clear that prophethood could not be given to the unjust and the disobedient, even if they belonged to the progeny of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام - a rule which destroys the very basis of the presumptuousness and vanity of the Jews. The present verse reminds them that the Ka'bah was built under divine commandment by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام himself with the help of his son Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليه السلام, and thus suggests that the performance of the Hajj and the orientation towards the Ka'bah have both been instituted by divine decree, and that the Holy Prophet ﷺ is a direct descendant of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليه السلام, and is reviving the Abrahamic Way, which the Jews too must follow.

Verse 125 briefly outlines the history of the re-construction of the Ka'bah, the characteristic qualities of the "House of Allah" and the city of Makkah, and the injunctions with regard to the respect which has to be paid to this sacred place. The Holy Qur'ān returns to the subject again and again in different chapters, providing more details. We shall

cite Verses 26 and 27 from the Sūrah "Al-Hajj" which deals particularly with the annual pilgrimage:

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ۝ وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَى كُلِّ صَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ۝

"And when We appointed for Ibrāhīm the place of the House: "You shall not associate anything with Me. And keep My House clean for those who circumambulate it, who stand there for the prayers, and who bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim the pilgrimage among men, and they shall come to you on foot and on every lean camel too, coming from every deep ravine.." (22:26-27)

Ibrāhīm عليه السلام migrated to Makkah

Ibn Kathīr reports from Mujāhid etc. that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was living in Syria when he received the revelation that Allah was going to indicate to him the site of the Ka'bah, which he was required to build and keep clean for those who should assemble there for performing the Hajj and offering the *Salāh*. In connection with the earlier verse, we have already told the story how he was led by the archangel Jibrā'il عليه السلام to the desert where the city of Makkah is now situated and where the remains of the earlier structure of the Ka'bah stood only in the shape of a mound, and how he was commanded by Allah to leave his wife and infant son behind and to return to Syria. He immediately started on the journey, but was naturally anxious about his wife and child. So, when he was out of ear-shot, he prayed to Allah for them, as has been reported in the Sūrah "Ibrāhīm":

رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ ۝

"My Lord, make this city a place of peace, and keep me and my sons away from worshipping idols." (14:35)

And he prayed further:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بُوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِندَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ ۝

"Our Lord, I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley which is incultivable, close to Your Holy House that they may, Our Lord, be steadfast in the prayers. So, make the hearts of men tender towards them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may be thankful." (14:37)

In the earlier commandment which had brought him to his place, Allah had asked him to keep His House clean. He knew that Allah intended the House to be kept clean not only from external dirt but also from internal filth - namely, association (*Shirk*) and infidelity (*Kufr*). So, while departing from this barren desert where he was leaving his family but where a town was to grow, he prayed to Allah, firstly, to make it a place of safety and peace, and, secondly, to protect him and his children from idol-worship and association. "The Friend of Allah" had attained that degree of knowledge where one sees oneself as a mere nothing, and one makes no movement without a full realization of the truth that nothing happens independently of Divine Will, and that all one's actions and even inclinations rest in the hand of Allah. So, he turned to Allah Himself for help in being able to carry out the command to keep the House of Allah clean from association and infidelity. There is another subtle suggestion in this prayer. Allah had commanded that due respect should be paid to His "House." Now, there was a likelihood that some people might begin, out of sheer ignorance, to worship the Ka'bah itself. That is why Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام specially prayed for him and his children to be protected from association (*shirk*). Then, out of his love for his wife and son, he prayed to Allah to provide them, in His grace, with fruits in this barren and uncultivable land where he was leaving them under divine command.

A *ḥadīth* in Al-Bukhārī's collection of the Traditions (*Aḥādīth*) tells us in detail how the archangel Jibra'il appeared and made the spring of *Zamzam* flow in the desert, how some people from the tribe of *Jurhum* came and settled there, and how Sayyidnā Ismā'il عليه السلام was married to a lady of this tribe. We also learn from different Traditions (*Aḥādīth*) of the Holy Prophet ﷺ that the command to settle near the Ka'bah and to keep it clean (mentioned in Verse 26-27 of the Sūrah

"Al-Hajj") was at that time addressed only to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, for his son was yet an infant. And in those circumstances the intention of the command was not to start the reconstruction of the Ka'bah but only to place the wife and the son of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام in this locality so that a human settlement should begin to take shape. On the other hand, the verse we are dealing with (2:125) repeats the same command to keep the House clean, but is addressed as much to Sayyidnā Ismā'il عليه السلام as to his father, for the son had now grown into a young and married man, and could be included in the command to rebuild the Ka'bah.

A *ḥadīth* reported by Al-Bukhārī says that, on one of his periodic visits to his wife and son at Makkah, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام found his son sitting under a tree, making arrows. He informed the son that Allah had entrusted him with a special task, and asked him if he would help his father. The son was, of course, as ready to obey and to serve as ever. Allah had already indicated the spot and also the area where the Ka'bah was to be rebuilt. When they started digging the ground, the earlier foundations became visible, and it was on them that they began to raise the walls. The next verse speaks of this event - وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ - "When Ibrāhīm was raising up the foundations of the House, and Ismā'il (too)." The order of the names indicates that the builder of the Ka'bah is Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, while the role of Sayyidnā Ismā'il عليه السلام is that of a helper.

All the verses of the Holy Qur'an on the subject of the Ka'bah either say that the location had been indicated by Allah Himself, or report the divine command to keep the House clean, but never suggest that a new House was to be built in a new place. This in itself shows that the Ka'bah already existed in some form. Indeed, the *Ḥadīth*, and history too, confirms this fact, and from these sources we learn that the earlier structure of the Ka'bah had either been destroyed at the time of the Deluge of Sayyidnā Nuḥ (عليه السلام) or raised into the heavens, leaving the foundations buried in the ground. Hence, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ismā'il عليه السلام were not the original founders of the Ka'bah, but had raised a new building on the earlier foundations.

As to who founded the Ka'bah for the first time and when, there is no fully authenticated *Ḥadīth* which could clarify this point. Certain narrations coming from the people of the Book, however, tell us that it was founded by the angels even before Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام came down to the earth. He built the Ka'bah a second time, or renovated it. This structure remained intact upto the time of the Deluge, which destroyed it, and left it a mere mound - the shape in which Sayyidna Ibrahim and Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليه السلام found it. And they constructed a new building on the site. Since then, the Ka'bah has undergone certain alterations, but has never been demolished completely. Before the Holy Prophet ﷺ assumed the prophetic functions, the Quraysh of Makkah built the Ka'bah afresh, and he himself took part in this renovation.

Some injunctions related to the Haram

(1) The word *Mathābah*, used in this verse, comes from the root *Thaba* (signifying "to come back"), and thus denotes a place to which one returns again and again. This shows that Allah has given a position of privilege to the Ka'bah - it shall always remain a place where people will assemble from the four corners of the world, and would long to return to it again and again. Al-Qurṭubī reports the great commentator Mujāhid to have said that one never has enough of visiting the Ka'bah, but comes back every time with a greater longing to return, and to see it again. Certain scholars have remarked that one of the signs of one's Ḥajj having been accepted by Allah is that, on one's return, one should find in one's heart a greater desire to present oneself in the House of Allah again. This is borne out by the experience of those who have had the good fortune to be there - each visit, instead of slaking the thirst, rather increases it. Considering that Makkah has nothing to offer by way of a beautiful landscape or easy access or mundane comforts, yet, its power to draw millions of people to itself every year is nothing short of miracle.

(2) This verse says that Allah has made "the House" a place of peace. "The House" refers not only to the Ka'bah itself, but also to the whole area of the Mosque which surrounds it, and is called the *Haram*. There are other instances in the Holy Qur'ān where the word "Ka'bah" or the expression *Baytullah* ("House of Allah") connotes the whole

area of the *Haram*. For example, the phrase: هَدْيًا بَالِغَ الْكَعْبَةِ : "an offering to reach the Ka'bah" (5:95) refers to the *Haram*, for the verse deals with the subject of animal sacrifice, while it is not legitimate to offer such a sacrifice inside the Ka'bah. So, Verse 125 means that the whole of the *Haram* has been made a place of peace - that is to say, people have been forbidden from shedding blood or taking revenge within these precincts (Ibn al-'Arabi). In fact, this commandment was one of the residues of the Way of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام which were still alive in the Age of Ignorance (*Al-Jāhiliyyah*), and all kinds of bloodshed or battle, individual or collective, were held to be forbidden inside this sanctuary, so much so that a man would never let himself take his revenge, even if he came upon the murderer of his brother or father in the *Haram*. The Islamic Shari'ah has preserved this injunction. The ban was lifted only for the sake of the Holy Prophet ﷺ on the day of the conquest of Makkah, and that too only for a few hours, and was reimposed for ever immediately after - the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself announced it in his address on the occasion. (Al-Bukhārī)

Now, as for the man who commits, within these precincts, a crime for which the Shari'ah has laid down a specific physical punishment (*Hadd*) or allowed the victim to be revenged (*Qisās*), the *Haram* will not provide sanctuary to him - the consensus holds that such a criminal will be duly punished. (Al-Jassas and Al-Qurtubi) For, the Holy Qur'an itself says: فَإِن قَاتَلْتُمُوهُمْ فَاتَّكِلُوهُم : "If they fight you [inside the *Haram*], you may kill them." (2:191) There is, however, a difference of views among the masters of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) on one point. What is to be done with the man who commits a crime outside, and then seeks a sanctuary in the *Haram*? Even in this case, some masters would have the criminal punished in the manner prescribed by the Shari'ah. On the other hand, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, believes that if such men are allowed to save themselves from punishment in this manner, the *Haram* would become an easy refuge for all kinds of criminals and disorder would prevail, but in view of the sanctity of the place, the criminal would not be punished inside the *Haram*, but forced to come out, and then the punishment prescribed by the Shari'ah would be duly given to him.

(3) The present verse mentions "the Station of Ibrāhīm." It is a

stone on which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm ﷺ had stood while building the Ka'bah, and which miraculously acquired the print of his foot. (Al-Bukhārī) The blessed Companion Anas says that he has himself seen the mark on the stone. On the other hand, it has been reported from the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās that the *Haram* as a whole is the "Station of Ibrāhīm." Probably he meant that the two *rak'ahs* of the *Salāh* which this verse enjoins upon us to offer near the "Station of Ibrāhīm" after completing *tawāf* (circumambulation) of the Ka'bah, may be offered anywhere within the precincts of the *Haram*, and that the prayers thus offered would be quite valid. Most of the *Fuqahā'* accept this view.

The *Maqam* of Ibrāhīm

(4) As to the commandment for making "the Station of Ibrāhīm" a place of offering one's prayers, the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself has explained it through his own words and actions on the occasion of his last *Ḥajj*. After completing the *tawaf*, when he reached "the Station of Ibrāhīm," placed some yards away from the Ka'bah, he recited this very verse, and then offered two *rak'ats* on the other side of this stone, with his face turned towards the Ka'bah (Muslim). The *Fuqahā'* have inferred from this the rule that if one does not get the room to stand close to "the Station of Ibrahim," one may, while offering prayers, validly stand at any distance from it that one can, so long as the Ka'bah, as well as "the Station of Ibrāhīm," is in front of him.

(5) This verse shows that it is necessary (*Wajib*) to offer two *rak'ahs* after the *tawāf* of the Ka'bah. (Al-Jaṣṣāṣ and Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī) But offering these prayers specifically behind the "Station of Ibrāhīm" is a *Sunnah* (the Way of the Holy Prophet ﷺ). There is, however, no bar on offering these prayers at any other spot within the *Haram*, for the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself has been reported to have offered them near the gate of the "House of Allah", as did the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, too (al-Jaṣṣāṣ). In his "*Al-Manāsik*", Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī says that if one is not, for some reason, able to offer these necessary (*Wajib*) prayers behind "the Station of Ibrāhīm," as required by the *Sunnah*, he may validly offer them anywhere he possibly can within the *Haram*, or even outside. In fact, this is exactly what happened to Sayyidah Umm Salmah رضى الله عنها, one of the wives of the

Holy Prophet ﷺ . On the occasion of her Last Hajj, she could not find the opportunity to offer these *Wājib* prayers inside the *Haram*, and was able to do so when she was outside the city of Makkah itself. Most of the *Fuqahā'*, except Imām Mālik, hold the view that if circumstances compel one to offer these prayers outside the *Haram*, one is not required to make an animal sacrifice by way of compensation.

(6) The divine command to طَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ : "Keep My House clean" includes purifying it from physical and external dirt as much as from internal filth like infidelity (*Kufr*) and association (*Shirk*), and from impurities like greed, lust, envy, pride, vanity, hypocrisy, etc. Then, the use of the expression "My House" indicates that the commandment applies to mosques in general, for all the mosques are "the Houses of Allah", as the Holy Qur'an itself has said فِي بُيُوتٍ أُذِنَ لِلَّهِ أَنْ يُرْفَعَ : "In houses which Allah has commanded to be raised up" (24:36). Al-Qurtubī reports that the Second *Khalīfah* 'Umar رضى الله عنه once heard a man shout in the mosque, and rebuked him for having forgotten where he was. That is to say, one should pay due respect to a mosque, and refrain from speaking loudly, and, above all, from saying something which the *Sharī'ah* has forbidden. In short, just as the *Haram* must be kept clean from all kinds of dirt and filth, external and internal, so must every mosque. Those who enter a mosque must keep their bodies and their clothes free from dirt, filth and even from bad smells, and also keep their hearts free from *Shirk*, hypocrisy, pride, malice and greed etc. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has asked the people not to enter a mosque, if they have just eaten raw onion or garlic, and has also forbidden very small children and mad men to enter a mosque for fear of their polluting it.

(7) The verse shows that "the House of Allah" is meant for people to make *tawaf* of the Ka'bah, to do *Itikāf* (to seek a retreat for worship and meditation), and to offer their prayers. In the case of those who come from outside to perform the Hajj, the *tawāf* carries greater merit than offering prayers. Lastly, the verse makes it clear that it is absolutely permissible to offer one's prayers inside the "House of Allah", whether the prayers are *farḍ* (obligatory) or *nafl* (supererogatory) (Jassās).

Verses 126 - 128

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ
 الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ
 فَأَمَّتَّعُهُ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرَّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ۝
 وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ
 مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ۝ رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ
 وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةٌ مُسْلِمَةٌ لَكَ وَإِرَانَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبَّ عَلَيْنَا ۝
 إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ۝

And when Ibrāhīm said, "My Lord, make this a city of peace, and provide its people with fruits - those of them who believe in Allah and the Last Day." He said, "And the one who disbelieves I shall make him enjoy a little, then I shall drag him to the punishment of the Fire. And an evil end it is! And when Ibrāhīm was raising up the foundations of the House, along with Ismā'īl: "Our Lord accept from us! Indeed, You - and You alone - are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing! And, our Lord, make us both submissive to You, and of our progeny a people submissive to You. And show us our ways of Pilgrimage and accept our repentance. Indeed, You - and You alone - are the Most-Relenting, the Very-Merciful." (Verses 126 - 128)

The prayers of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام

Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام always carried out the commandments of Allah without losing a moment, and was ready to make all kinds of sacrifices in His way, whether they involved worldly goods, or wife and children, or his own likes and dislikes. All the same, having affection and love for one's family is not only a natural urge in man, but also a divine commandment. This is what manifests itself in the present verses, where we find him praying for the well-being of his family in this world as much as in the other.

The prayer begins with the word *Rabb*, which lexically signifies "One who gives nurture." Thus, it teaches us the proper mode of praying to Allah, for this form of address in itself draws the mercy and

grace of Allah on the man who is praying. The first thing Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام prayed for was that Allah may turn the barren desert where he had left his family under divine commandment, into a city, so that his wife and son should not feel lonely, and that their daily needs should be easily satisfied. The same prayer occurs in Sūrah "Ibrāhīm" (14:35), but employs the construction *Al-balad* ("the city"), while the present verse employs *Baladan* ("a city"). The difference probably arises from the fact that the prayer reported here was made when the place was still a desert and Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام wished "a city" to grow in this barren land, while the prayer reported in Surah "Ibrāhīm" was made when "the city" had already risen and was quite well-known, for near the end of the same Sūrah we find him saying الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي وَهَبَ لِي عَلَى الْكِبَرِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ : "Praise be to Allah who has given me, in my old age, Ismā'īl and Ishāq" (14:39), which suggests that the second prayer was made after the birth of Sayyidnā Ishāq (Isaac عليه السلام), an event that occurred thirteen years after the birth of Sayyidnā Ismā'īl (Ishmael عليه السلام). (Ibn Kathīr)

Coming back to the verse under discussion, we see that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام also prayed for this city to be made "a place of peace" - that is to say, safe from slaughter and plunder as from calamities, and secure against the domination of the infidels. The prayer was granted. Makkah became a thriving city, which is now a place of pilgrimage for Muslims who come to it in millions every year. It also became safe and secure, for no infidel has ever been able to conquer it or dominate over it. The Holy Qur'ān itself narrates the story of "Aṣḥāb al-Fil" ("the People of the Elephant") who were destroyed for having ventured to invade Makkah. The city has also been safe from slaughter and plunder. Even before the advent of Islam, the Arabs in the Age of Ignorance, for all their deviation into infidelity and association, deeply respected the Ka'bah and its environs as a matter of their creed - in spite of being vengeful, they would never take their revenge so long as the enemy remained within the precincts of the Ḥaram. In fact, the inhabitants of Makkah themselves were respected throughout Arabia, and the trading caravans passing to and fro between Makkah and Syria or Yemen were never interrupted. Allah has given security even to birds and animals inside the Ḥaram, and

forbidden all kinds of hunting within this area. So, even birds and animals distinctly show a feeling of security inside the *Haram*, and are not scared of men. The sanctity of the place was emphasised and enforced by Islam even further. As for the slaughter which took place in the *Haram* at the hands of Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf or the *Qarāmītah*, it was the work of those who called themselves Muslims, and not an invasion by infidels. If a man chooses to set fire to his own house, it does not falsify the general rule of the security provided to it against outsiders. Moreover, incidents like these have been very rare since the days of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and, then, we also know the dreadful fate of those who had dared to pollute "the House of Allah." In short, Allah has, in answer to his prayer, made the city so secure that even the *Dajjāl* (Anti-Christ) shall not have the power to enter it.

Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had also prayed for the people of Makkah to be provided with fruits. The surrounding land was uncultivable, but, in answer to the prayer, Allah made the neighbouring city of Tāif very fertile and productive in fruits, which started coming to Makkah. According to certain traditions of the Israelites, Tāif was originally situated in Syria, but was transferred to the present locality by the Archangel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام under divine command.

The Ibrahimic wisdom

One may also notice that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام did not pray for the land of Makkah to be made fertile, but suggested in his prayer that the fruits might come to Makkah from somewhere else as an import. He probably intended that his descendants should not get unduly absorbed in agriculture, for his purpose in founding the settlement was that his people *يُؤَيِّمُوا الصَّلَاةَ*: "should be steadfast in the prayers." In other words, he wanted the essential function of his descendants to protect "the House of Allah" and to engage themselves in acts of worship. Otherwise, he could have prayed for Makkah itself to be made fertile, and Allah would have granted the prayer as easily.

The point becomes all the more clear if we consider the word *Thamarāt* (plural of *Thamarah* - "fruit"). This word appears in the same context again in another verse: *يُجْنَى إِلَيْهِ نَضْرَاتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ*: "the fruits of all kinds of things are drawn towards it (the city)" (28:57). If it is the

fruits of trees that are intended here, the word "*Yujbā*" ("drawn") is a sufficient indication that in granting the prayer Allah had not promised to produce them in Makkah itself, but to send them to the city from other places. On the other hand, the verse does not speak of "the fruits of all kinds of trees", but of "the fruits of all kinds of things." Obviously, the intention is to generalize the sense of "fruits" - a word which in common idiom implies the product obtained from a thing or an activity. The word should, then, cover not only the fruits of trees, but also the products of all kinds of crafts and industries in fact, all that is needed to sustain human life. Now, everyone can see for himself that Makkah possesses neither agriculture nor industry, and yet enjoys the benefits of these as much as any prosperous city in the world.

Verse 126 also provides an example of the rectitude of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. The first phrase of his prayer for the well-being and prosperity of the people of Makkah seems to suggest that he wished to include the infidels as much as the faithful. But earlier when he had prayed for all his descendants without making any distinction between the faithful and the infidels (as reported in Verse 124), Allah had answered that the prayer would be granted in the case of the faithful, but not in the case of the unjust - that is, *mushrikīn* (associators). On that occasion, he had prayed for the position of *Imāmah* (leadership). But the fear of Allah and the solicitude for being totally obedient to Him was so deeply ingrained in the heart of "the Friend of Allāh" that even in praying for the prosperity of his people the earlier proviso came to his mind, and he at once added a rejoinder to the effect that he was praying only for the faithful. Allah was pleased with his rectitude, and told him that the worldly prosperity would be given to the disbelievers too, but that in the other world the faithful would be the only ones to prosper, while the disbelievers would receive nothing more than the punishment due to them.

Verse 127 shows another essential quality of this great prophet. In obedience to Allah, he had left the fertile land of Syria and made his wife and child to settle in the barren desert, and now he was taking up the labour of building "the House of Allah." This was a moment when a man who had been bearing such hardships in the way of Allah could

normally be expected to feel satisfied with himself and relax in a mood of self-congratulation. But "the Friend of Allah" recognized the Majesty of Allah, and knew that no creature can possibly worship or obey his Creator as is His due, but within his own limited powers. Consequently, he also knew that in performing the hardest or the greatest tasks one should not be proud of one's attainment, but should, in all humility, pray to Allah to accept the little effort one has been capable of making - and that, too, with the grace of Allah Himself. That is exactly what Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام did when he started, along with his young son, to build the Ka'bah. That is to say, he prayed to Allah to accept this deed, for Allah hears all prayers, and knows the intentions of His creatures.

Verse 128 reports that he further prayed to Allah "to make" him and his son obedient to His commandments and to His Will. This prayer too proceeds from the same sense of fear and awe, and from the same knowledge. He has, all his life, been performing exemplary deeds of obedience, and yet he prays to "be made" obedient. It is so, because the more one grows in one's knowledge of Divine Majesty, the more one comes to realize that one is not being faithful and obedient as is due.

It is significant that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام included his descendants too in his prayer. This shows that the "men of Allah" who never hesitate in sacrificing themselves and their children in the way of Allah, yet love them deeply. All the same, they know what the proper requirements of parental love are, and how they should be fulfilled. This is something beyond the reach of average men, who suppose the well-being of their children to reside in physical health and comfort alone, and spend all their love and care on providing just this to their family. But those who have received the favour of Allah show a much greater solicitude for the spiritual well-being of their children than for the physical, being more anxious as to what happens to them in the other world than in this. So, the great prophet prayed to Allah to make a group from among his descendants fully obedient to Him. This prayer aims at another advantage as well. Experience tells us that if those who enjoy a respectable position in their community,

and their descendants keep to the right path, they are naturally held in esteem, and their conduct inspires others to reform themselves. (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ) Allah heard this prayer too, and among the descendants of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام there has always been a group of people obedient to Allah and firm in the Straight Path. Even in the Age of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) when the whole world, and Arabia in particular, was lost in the darkness of idol-worship and *Shirk*, there still remained some men from among his descendants who had faith in the One God, who believed in the other world, and were obedient to Allah - for example, Zayd ibn 'Amr bin Nufayl, and Quss ibn Sā'idah. It has also been reported that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Ḥāshim, the grand-father of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, shunned idol-worship and *Shirk*. (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ)

We might add an explanatory note about the word *Manāsik* (the plural of *Mansik*) which occurs in Verse 128. This word signifies the different actions involved in the performance of the Ḥajj, and also the different places where the rites are performed - like 'Arafah, *Muzdalifah* or *Minā*. Both the meanings of the word are intended here, and the substance of the last part of the prayer is that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm wanted the rites of the Hajj to be explained and their locations to be indicated. The verb which has been employed in this connection is *Arina* - "show us." Now, seeing is done through the eyes, and also through the heart. So, the different locations of the rites were shown to him through the Archangel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام, and the injunctions regarding the Hajj were explained in detail.

Verse 129

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝

And, our Lord, raise in their midst a Messenger from among them, who should recite to them Your verses, and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and make them pure. Indeed You, and You alone, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (Verse 129)

The prayer of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام for the Holy Prophet ﷺ

Let us start by commenting on certain words which occur in this verse. The Arabic word *Yatlū* (translated in English as "recite", or "read out") comes from the word *Tilāwah*, (تَلَاوَة) which lexically signifies "to follow, to obey", but in the terminology of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* denotes the recitation or reading of the Holy Qur'ān or of a Divine Book, for one who reads a Divine Book is also required to obey it fully. The word also suggests that it is obligatory to read the Holy Qur'ān exactly as it has been revealed by Allah, and not to add or subtract a word on one's own part, not even to change the pronunciation of a word which often may, in the Arabic language, change the very meaning of the word concerned. In his "*Mufradat al-Qur'ān*", Imām al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that the word *Tilāwah* cannot, in current idiom, be applied to the reading of any book other than the Word of Allah.

The word *Kitāb* (Book) in this verse, of course, refers to the Holy Qur'ān itself. As to the word *Hikmah* (usually translated in English as "wisdom"), it carries various meanings in Arabic - for example, arriving at the truth, justice, exact knowledge, etc. (al-Qamus). According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, when the word is used in speaking of Allah, it connotes the total and perfect knowledge of all existents, and flawless creation; but when applied to someone other than Allah, it connotes a proper knowledge of the existents, and good deeds. In connection with the present verse, Maulanā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan has interpreted the word as "profound truths, or subtle realities", while Maulanā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has taken it to mean "the art of understanding properly". The commentators from among the blessed Companions and their immediate successors, whose interpretations come directly from the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself, have advanced different connotations of the word *Hikmah* - some say that it refers to the commentary and exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, others believe that it means the proper understanding of the religion (*Dīn*), or the injunctions of the Shari'ah, or such commandments of Allah which have been received through the word of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. But the truth of the matter is that in spite of the apparent variety of expressions used, the substance of all these statements is the same -

namely, the Way (*Sunnah*) of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the *Ḥadīth*. This is the interpretation reported from Qatādah by Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Jarīr.

Commentary

Now, to proceed with the commentary, let us consider why Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, in praying for the well-being of his descendants in this world and in the other, requested Allah to send a prophet from among them. The reason is twofold. Firstly, the appearance of a prophet from among them would in itself be an honour and a blessing. Secondly, the prophet being a member of their own group, they would be thoroughly familiar with his past and present and with his ways, and thus find it easy to have trust in him, and to profit from his guidance. According to a *ḥadīth*, in accepting this prayer Allah promised that this prophet would be sent in the last of all ages. (Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Kathīr)

According to a *ḥadīth* reported by Imām Aḥmad in his "Musnad", the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said that Allah had chosen him as the Last Prophet at a time when Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام was not yet born and only his clay was being prepared, and that he was the manifestation of the prayer of his father, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, of the good tidings brought by Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus Christ عليه السلام), and of the dream seen by his mother. The good-tidings refer to the announcement made by Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام, as reported in the Holy Qur'ān:

مُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ

"I have brought the good-tidings of a prophet who is to come after me, and his name is Aḥmad." (61:6)

And the mother of the Holy Prophet ﷺ had, during her pregnancy, seen in a dream that a light went out of her which illumined the places in far-off Syria. Then, the words of the present prayer of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام have been repeated in two different places in the Holy Qur'ān - once in Sūrah "Al'Imrān" (Ch.3) and then in Sūrah "Al-Jumu'ah" (Ch. 62). Both the passages where these words have been repeated speak of the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ, and thus show that he is the prophet whom Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had prayed for.

All these verses - namely, the present verse from Sūrah "Al-Baqarah", and the other two from Sūrah "Al-Imrān" and Sūrah "Al-Jumu'ah" respectively - say the same thing about the Holy Prophet ﷺ in the same words. That is to say, they define the purpose of his being sent to the world as the Messenger of Allah and his functions as a prophet. These functions are threefold. Firstly, to recite the verses; secondly, to teach the Book and also to teach "wisdom"; and thirdly, "to purify" the people. Now, let us examine the three in detail.

(1) The verse speaks separately of "reciting" the Holy Qur'ān and of "teaching" it. Since "reciting" pertains to the words, and "teaching" to their meanings, the explicit distinction between the two shows that the words of the Holy Qur'ān are no less important in themselves and for themselves than their meanings, and that the recitation and preservation of the words is obligatory, and constitutes an act of worship. In order to understand this aspect of the question we have only to recall that the first and immediate listeners and disciples of the Holy Prophet ﷺ not only knew Arabic very well but were themselves very eloquent speakers of the language, some of them being even poets. For an audience like this it should have apparently been enough to recite the Holy Qur'ān, without any explanation or commentary, for them to be taught - in their case, the "reciting" and the "teaching" should have, for all practical purpose, become one and the same thing. Why has the Holy Qur'ān, then, mentioned them separately as two distinct prophetic functions?

If one considers the question seriously, one can easily draw two important conclusions. To begin with, one would come to see that the Holy Qur'ān is not like other books where meanings are the ultimate object, while words have only a secondary place as being no more than a vehicle for the ideas, and can hence tolerate minor changes and modifications so long as the meaning does not suffer. In the case of man-made books, it would thus be totally frivolous to go on reading the words without paying any attention to the meanings. On the contrary, in the case of the Holy Qur'ān the words are in themselves as necessary and inalienable a part of the intention as the meanings, and the Shari'ah has laid down particular injunctions with regard to the words of the Holy Qur'ān. That is why in the Science of the Principles